United Nations E/C.12/2016/SR.25

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
14 June 2016

Original: English

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Fifty-eighth session

Summary record (partial)* of the 25th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 8 June 2016, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Sadi

Contents

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Sixth periodic report of Sweden (continued)

* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of the present document* to the English Translation Section, room E.6040, Palais des Nations, Geneva (trad_sec_eng@unog.ch).

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.16-09397 (E) 130616 140616

1609397

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Sixth periodic report of Sweden (continued) (E/C.12/SWE/6; E/C.12/SWE/Q/6 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Sweden took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Baralt** (Sweden), replying to a question raised at the previous meeting on the incorporation of the Covenant into the Swedish domestic legal framework, said that the Government had directed its efforts towards guaranteeing the economic, social and cultural rights of newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers, as well as those already living in the country, through a series of practical measures. The question of incorporating United Nations human rights conventions into domestic law was still under consideration and, to date, only the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been put forward for domestication. The approach to incorporating the Convention proposed by the judiciary was currently the subject of broad consultations, in which the Government intended to participate, but the final decision lay with the national parliament, not the Government. The gradual approach taken to other human rights conventions would ensure that, once domesticated, they enjoyed the highest possible legal status.

3. A new strategy aimed at improving the human rights situation in Sweden would be submitted to the national parliament in the near future. The strategy provided for the creation of a new independent human rights institution which would lead efforts towards achieving that goal.

4. Regrettably, the tax cuts imposed by the previous Government had only served to exacerbate the situation of the most vulnerable groups in Swedish society, which included persons with disabilities. The Government had invested in special measures aimed at facilitating the integration of those persons into the labour market. Public and private employers who were committed to hiring persons with disabilities received additional funding and special subsidies, respectively. Furthermore, more than 60 government agencies had pledged to provide traineeships to young persons with disabilities. While great strides had been made in ensuring the accessibility of public transport, the Internet and information brochures to persons with disabilities, more needed to be done to change the negative public perceptions of those persons and to promote their acceptance in Swedish society.

5. The proportion of the State budget allocated to social welfare and to the realization of the economic, social and cultural rights enshrined in the Covenant had been increased, but no precise spending figures could be provided at that time.

6. **Ms. Stenson** (Sweden) said that there were currently no plans to make the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination contained in the Discrimination Act open-ended. However, the European Convention on Human Rights, which was part of Swedish law and was frequently invoked by the Swedish courts, contained a non-exhaustive list of those grounds and therefore provided comprehensive protection against discrimination.

7. **Ms. Tekin Befrits** (Sweden) said that the statement made in paragraph 15 of the written replies (E/C.12/SWE/Q/6/Add.1) to the effect that the burden of proof automatically fell, and would continue to fall, on the individual or group making a certain claim reflected a basic principle of the Swedish legal system, although it might appear harsh. The statement

should be considered in the light of the judgment issued by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Handölsdalen Sami village and others v. Sweden*, according to which it was reasonable to place the burden of proving ownership of the disputed land on the Sami villages that used it for winter grazing, as the Swedish landowners were in possession of a valid land title. Furthermore, the Sami villages, as legal entities, could avail themselves of private insurance to cover litigation costs, in keeping with the standard practice in Sweden. The Government was also exploring alternative methods for settling disputes, such as mediation.

8. **Ms. Söderberg** (Sweden) said that there had been an increase in the number of persons with disabilities registering with the Public Employment Service in 2015, which was due in part to an improved methodology for identifying and catering to their needs. The additional government funding allocated to public companies would allow them to create more jobs for persons with disabilities, especially young persons. The Government had also introduced a guarantee whereby no young person could be unemployed for more than 90 days without being offered some form of work or training. New labour market initiatives had also been launched whereby young persons who had left school without having completed their secondary education could continue their studies and young persons who had completed their secondary education but who had not yet entered employment could receive training or gain work experience. The Public Employment Service had concluded agreements with the various municipal authorities for the purpose of implementing those initiatives. It was hoped that the initiatives would yield positive results in the long term.

9. Although the Penal Code did not specifically criminalize sexual harassment in the workplace, its more general provisions relating to sexual crimes covered that offence.

10. In Sweden, the task of fixing minimum wage rates was, and would continue to be, carried out by the social partners. The current labour market model allowed the social partners to negotiate and conclude collective agreements, which covered 90 per cent of the Swedish workforce. Sweden had enjoyed economic growth and witnessed a drop in unemployment under that model and so had no plans to deviate from it. There were only a small number of listed companies in Sweden. In State-run companies, around 45 per cent of board members were women. The 5 per cent gender wage gap across the public and private sectors was difficult to explain in statistical terms but was not necessarily attributable to discrimination. In Sweden, as in many other countries, the proportion of women working on a part-time basis was greater than that of men. The Government planned to conduct an assessment in the near future to determine the impact of part-time working regimes on women's ability to support themselves financially.

11. **Ms. Baralt** (Sweden) said that, as part of its strategy to combat poverty and promote the equal enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by all segments of Swedish society, the Government intended to increase investment in housing for low-income families and young or elderly persons living alone; to improve the country's infrastructure, including the public transport network and information and communication services; to promote greater diversity in the workplace; to provide unemployed persons with the skills and training that they needed to access the labour market; and to improve performance in matching skills to the needs of the labour market with a view to further reducing unemployment.

12. Measures taken to help disadvantaged families increase their income included the introduction of flexible day-care arrangements that allowed both parents to work full-time to support their children. Moreover, single parents were now entitled to more benefits than before and the statutory parental leave allowance for fathers had been increased to three months to encourage fathers to take on a greater share of child-rearing responsibilities. However, in order to retain that increased allowance, both parents were required to take at

least three months of parental leave and could not transfer any mandatory days not taken to their spouse.

13. Newly arrived asylum seekers were entitled to the same social security benefits as Swedish citizens. The period of validity of some temporary residence permits could be extended to 13 months to allow holders to qualify for social security benefits.

14. The law criminalizing the buying but not the selling of sex served to protect victims of trafficking engaged in prostitution, as it encouraged persons in that situation to approach the public authorities by removing the threat of prosecution. There was also evidence to suggest that the fact that the law targeted the buyers and not the sellers of sex deterred human trafficking. A special ambassador to combat human trafficking, who was also responsible for promoting and ensuring compliance with the aforementioned law, had recently been appointed.

15. The national strategy to combat gender-based violence also addressed acts of violence committed within same-sex relationships and against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.

16. **Ms. Bengtson** (Sweden) said that both forced and child marriage were prohibited in Sweden. In 2014, new civil and criminal law provisions had been enacted to strengthen the existing safeguards against those phenomena. Furthermore, the offences of forced marriage and deception leading to forced marriage had been introduced in the Penal Code. The possibility of granting children permission to marry on an exceptional basis had also been done away with and the provisions relating to the recognition of foreign marriages had been made more stringent. While a total of 48 cases of forced marriage had been reported in 2015, no convictions had been obtained. The public prosecution service had been tasked with reviewing all cases of forced marriage to determine whether there was a need to improve the Swedish authorities' approach to investigating that crime. A total of 132 child marriages were reported to have taken place outside Sweden, the vast majority of which involved girls. Efforts had been made to raise awareness among asylum seekers of the fact that child marriage was illegal in Sweden. Any female minor seeking asylum in Sweden who was accompanied by an adult male who was not her parent or guardian was treated as a child and was subject to the rules applicable to unaccompanied minors.

17. The Government attached great importance to preventing violence against children and young persons in Sweden. According to the Swedish Crime Survey, women and girls between 16 and 24 years of age had been those most vulnerable to violence in 2015. Special studies to determine the vulnerability of young persons to different forms of violence had also been conducted. A survey conducted in nine different youth clinics had pointed to the high prevalence of violence against young persons.

18. The 2014 Committee on Sexual Offences had reviewed the legal provisions relating to the crime of rape and, as part of that review, had considered the possibility of introducing regulations based on consent. The definition of rape had been expanded twice and, in 2013, the phrase "helpless state" had been replaced by the phrase "particularly vulnerable situation" to make it clear that situations in which a victim responded passively to a sexual attack were also covered by that definition.

19. Sexual offences had been reported and prosecuted at an increasing rate for several years, mainly due to a generalized rise in the reporting of crime and to the criminalization of more acts. According to the Swedish Crime Survey, there was no indication that women were at greater risk of assault, threat or harassment. The 2014 Committee on Sexual Offences was looking into the notion of consent and the reasons for the relative lack of convictions and would present its findings in October 2016. The authorities were aware that women from minority groups who experienced violence sometimes had difficulty obtaining support, and the guidelines issued by the National Board of Health and Welfare identified

age and background as factors of particular vulnerability. In addition, specialized training for police officers and judges included basic information on violence against women and risk assessments. The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community would be covered under the forthcoming strategy on violence against women.

20. **Mr. Jacobson** (Sweden) said that the large influx of asylum seekers had led to a review of provisions on family reunification. Those who were granted refugee status had the right to family reunification, while those granted subsidiary protection did not, unless they had applied prior to 24 November 2015. However, residence permits would continue to be granted for the purpose of family reunification where the rejection of an application would violate an international obligation. The bill containing amendments to those provisions was before parliament and a decision was expected on 21 June 2016.

21. **Ms. Remaeus** (Sweden) said that, although the Government believed in the principle of freedom of movement within the European Union, persons who wished to stay longer than three months in Sweden had to be employed or have good prospects for employment, or again have sufficient means to meet their needs and hold health insurance. European Union citizens without the right to residence had a limited right to social services during a temporary stay in Sweden: for the first three months they were considered as visitors and were not entitled to assistance or health care, except in emergencies. Those with the right of residence were entitled to the same assistance as other residents. The Government took the long view and was working to enhance the standard of living in countries of origin.

22. Homelessness was addressed under both social and housing policy. The growing dearth of affordable housing was compounded by the large number of refugees. The Government had allocated 60 billion kronor for housing in 2015, had launched a series of initiatives to facilitate access to housing for low-income households and had recently convened talks with the opposition parties to discuss a reform of the housing policy in order to better satisfy demand. The county administrative boards were tasked with supporting the efforts of local authorities to tackle homelessness, and the National Board of Health and Welfare would be conducting a national survey on the topic in 2017.

23. Referring the Committee to the replies to the list of issues (E/C.12/SWE/Q/6/Add.1), she said that forced eviction from permanent housing was tightly regulated. Social services had made significant efforts to prevent eviction by providing financial assistance and advice and alternative rental solutions. Some 150 European Union citizens had been evicted from an illegal camp in Malmö in November 2015, but NGOs had found beds for many of them. Residential segregation was more a function of employment status than of ethnicity, so efforts to combat the problem focused largely on increasing access to the labour market and on achieving coherent and sustainable urban development.

24. **Ms. Stenson** (Sweden) said that housing had been an integral part of the Roma strategy since its inception in 2012 and that the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning was combating discrimination in the housing market, including by setting up a network composed of Roma representatives, property owners and landlords to draft guidelines and raise awareness. The Government was well aware that Roma women and girls were particularly vulnerable and had incorporated a gender perspective into the Roma strategy. The county administrative boards lent their support to public entities and civil society to raise awareness of the situation of Roma women, in particular with regard to domestic violence, and the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society funded various health promotion initiatives and experience-sharing between Roma and non-Roma organizations. In 2014, the National Board of Health and Welfare, in cooperation with Roma women, had produced training materials on inclusiveness for social services personnel. In 2015, the Public Health Agency had conducted an in-depth study of the health and living conditions of Roma women and girls, which had revealed that they were treated

less well than other women in several spheres and tended to have lower incomes, be in poorer health and be more subject to violence.

25. **Mr. Fogelström** (Sweden) said that forced psychiatric treatment was governed by the Act on Compulsory Mental Care and was under no circumstances administered solely on grounds of disability. Nevertheless, a memorandum was being drafted to clarify the application of the Act. Women were not more likely than men to be forced to undergo psychiatric treatment. Electroconvulsive therapy was used chiefly to treat severe depression and, given that more women tended to suffer from the disorder, it followed that more women underwent the therapy than men, both voluntarily and otherwise. Persons being treated under the Act had the right to legal aid, as well as a support person, upon request. Promoting good mental health was one of the Government's main concerns, as demonstrated by the annual appropriation of 1 billion kronor. Health-care professionals had a duty to treat asylum seekers in the same manner as all others; however, the considerable influx in 2015 had put a strain on the health-care system. As a result, the services were different for child and adult asylum seekers and undocumented migrants: those under 18 received health and dental care on a par with Swedish children, whereas those over 18 received only emergency care, unless they were completing their high school education, in which case they had the benefit of student medical coverage.

26. **Ms. Remaeus** (Sweden) said that it was difficult to measure the number of intravenous drug users; the latest figure of 26,000 dated back to 1998. The National Board of Health and Welfare published annual guidelines on the treatment of drug addiction, which included opioid substitution therapy (OST) among recommended methods. The number of new OST patients had risen between 2006 and 2011 but had since peaked. The therapy was available in all counties, as well as in some prisons. While the rise in drug overdose deaths was primarily due to changes in data-collection and analysis methodology, the rate remained high and would be addressed. In that regard, Malmö county had approved naloxone for widespread distribution. The Government intended to enact a new law in the spring of 2017 to expand the needle exchange programme and make it accessible to all persons aged over 18. In 2015, the Public Health Agency had published new guidelines on the prevention of hepatitis C, especially among drug users.

27. **Mr. Nilsson** (Sweden) said that studies had confirmed the general shortage of mother-tongue teachers for national minority languages. In the case of Sami, there was the added difficulty of recruiting teachers with the correct variant of the language. Since 2013, a number of universities had been developing teacher training programmes in an effort to grow the pool of minority-language teachers. The National Agency for Education was working to increase access of national minorities to instruction in their native languages by designing teaching materials and awarding grants for teachers to pursue studies in minority languages, most recently in Sami, Meänkieli and Romani.

28. The national minorities had greater access to mother-tongue tuition than other groups in Sweden, in accordance with the provisions of the Covenant, the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Recently, provision had been made for mother-tongue remote education, in particular in the Sami language. Bilingual education for national minorities speaking languages other than Finnish had been extended to the end of June 2016.

29. The Education Act stipulated that child asylum seekers in Sweden, and children residing in that country without a legal permit, had a right to education from preschool to upper secondary level if they began before the age of 18. Children who were European Union citizens staying in Sweden under the three-month rule did not have the right to education, but education could be provided at the discretion of local authorities. The Government took the view that all European Union countries should ensure that children

were educated in their country of residence, and where possible, in their home countries; it had signed agreements with Bulgaria and Romania with regard to support for the education of Roma children.

30. Measures had been taken to improve the participation of women in the research sector, including by making such careers more attractive to women. Introducing women to male-dominated fields of employment such as medicine, natural sciences and engineering required an early start: efforts were therefore being made to mainstream gender throughout the education system.

31. International collaboration on the preparation of scientific papers had increased in all subject areas in the past decade; currently almost two-thirds of such papers were written in cooperation with researchers from other countries. The world average was 25 per cent.

32. **Mr. Dunås** (Sweden) said that a question had been asked about the criteria used for awarding grants related to the culture and languages of national minorities where no statistics about minority populations were available. For historical reasons, Swedish law did not permit the compilation of statistics on ethnicity or religion. Moreover, ethnic minorities were deeply opposed to the compilation of such statistics. Since it was important to have statistics on the living conditions of the population, including minorities, the Swedish authorities were using other means to acquire that information. Grants were awarded to organizations representing peoples that defined themselves as national minorities; an example was the grants for Sami culture distributed by the Sami Parliament. There were grants also, for instance, to the Institute for Language and Folklore, which was working to strengthen the use of minority languages. The Government planned to study ways of reforming the Act on National Minorities and National Minority Languages with a view to ensuring the rights of such peoples.

33. Noting that, in paragraph 127 of its written replies to the list of issues (E/C.12/SWE/Q/6/Add.1), the Government had provided information on Internet services in Sweden, he pointed out that directives regarding Internet access were the same in Sweden as in other European Union member States. The Internet penetration rate in Sweden was very high, at 93 per cent, and in recent years the Government had devoted large sums of money to promoting Internet usage. The Government was also working on the provision of broadband access in sparsely populated areas of Sweden.

34. Sweden warmly welcomed the recent political agreement on a European Union Directive on improving the accessibility of public sector websites, which established specific technical requirements for making those sites accessible to all citizens, including persons with disabilities and older persons. Those requirements would also apply to Swedish cultural institutions receiving government monies. Many forms of art and media were now converging on the Internet, and so access entailed the availability of newspapers, books and television programmes. Audio newspapers and audio books were currently digitalized and available on the web. Consideration was being given to reforming Swedish law to require the availability of on-demand products as well.

35. In addition, the Swedish Post and Telecom Authority was working to increase the accessibility and usability of electronic communications and mail services, in particular to persons with disabilities. It held competitions on various topics with a view to developing innovative services for such persons.

36. Lastly, an initiative launched in cooperation with the Swedish Film Institute had dramatically increased the availability of cinema to persons with disabilities, through audio description, spoken subtitles, and special headsets.

37. **Ms. Baralt** (Sweden) said that the Committee had asked how information about the Convention reached the many municipalities in Sweden. In addition to disseminating

important laws, the Government sent out recommendations to populations that in its view needed guidance. For instance, a handbook provided guidance to vulnerable European Union citizens on how to obtain emergency social assistance. For the large number of unaccompanied minors in Sweden, hotlines had been set up and handbooks distributed to assist them in understanding and protecting their rights. The Government had also recently entered into an agreement with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions to inculcate knowledge of human rights in the municipalities. It had also established a new website for the dissemination of recommendations from the United Nations human rights treaty bodies, with a view to ensuring their accessibility to the public and to key institutions in Sweden.

38. **Ms. Bras Gomes** said that she was pleased that Sweden still considered becoming a party to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant, and that it was envisaging the preparation of a comprehensive anti-discrimination bill. With regard to the protection of vulnerable persons from other member countries of the European Union, she wished to emphasize that the relevant Covenant obligations took precedence over European Union directives, and that it was the obligation of the State to honour its commitments under that instrument.

39. **Mr. Dasgupta** said that there was clearly a high level of respect for economic, social and cultural rights in Sweden. Some lacunae, however, existed. It was known that forced child marriages were occurring in immigrant communities; and yet, no convictions had been handed down. He wondered if the consummation of a child marriage was considered an act of rape, and whether parents were treated as accessories to the crime of rape.

40. He would also like to know more about human trafficking. Apparently the purchaser of sexual services was prosecuted, but not the seller, who was presumed to be a victim of trafficking. However, if a woman had to prove that she was a victim of trafficking, she would have to identify her trafficker. He wondered whether that lacuna might be the reason why, according to some reports, Sweden continued to be a hub for human trafficking.

41. **Ms. Shin** said she wondered whether legislation prohibiting the purchase of sexual services also applied to such purchases abroad, and whether any convictions had been handed down.

42. Persons unable to pay their rent should not be evicted from their homes if no housing alternatives were available. She wondered how much social housing was needed, and how much was being provided. She enquired whether, in the case of the Roma, the Swedish Government was willing and able to provide social housing on a temporary basis; and what measures had been taken to address the educational and health needs of that population.

43. Finally, she would like to know how many young asylum seekers had no access to health services.

44. **Mr. Schrijver** asked why no consideration was being given in Sweden to a national minimum wage. In addition, it would be interesting to know how many convictions had been handed down for sexual harassment in the workplace, what had been the nature of the charges, and whether sexual harassment cases could be settled out of court.

45. He also wished to know whether Sweden envisaged incorporating the Covenant and other international human rights instruments into national law. In a recent case, a municipal government had refused to allow a severely disabled person to install a special therapeutic swimming pool; had the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities been incorporated into national law, that would not have been possible.

46. **Mr. Pillay** said he was concerned about the way in which the State party approached the issue of informal or what it called illegal settlements. Forced evictions must be dealt

with in accordance with international standards. The Committee's general comment No. 7 on the right to adequate housing: forced evictions specified that people must not be forcibly evicted unless alternative housing was provided.

47. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** said that he looked forward to clarification of the Swedish Government's position on the concept of "maximum available resources" in relation to article 2 of the Covenant. He pointed out that the economic sanctions imposed on many States pursuant to the Stockholm Process had had a harmful impact on the economic, social and cultural rights of the populations concerned. He hoped that Sweden would reconsider its position in order to contribute to the full realization by all States of the rights guaranteed under article 2.

48. **The Chair** asked what rights were available to refugees in Sweden while they awaited the regularization of their status, whether there were tax incentives to businesses for hiring disabled persons, and what had been the results of prosecutions for sexual harassment. He also wondered how a forced child marriage that occurred before the child arrived in Sweden was handled; in that regard it would be interesting to consider whether the use of the term "forced marriage" was appropriate when a child was involved.

49. **Ms. Baralt** (Sweden) said that her delegation was surprised to hear that the Committee had received information indicating that Sweden was a destination country for trafficked girls, as that was not what was indicated by the statistical data available to her Government. In Sweden, both the buyer of sex services and the trafficker were penalized, while the victim was supported and protected and was thus more likely to provide valuable information to the authorities.

50. In the past, child marriage had not been widely debated in Sweden. With the recent increase in migration flows, however, it had become a serious and important issue that must be tackled at multiple levels. Child marriages would not be recognized by Sweden, and the child bride would be separated from her husband and treated as a child. It was nevertheless important to understand that many families forced their children into marriage as a last resort in order to increase their chances of surviving the trip to Sweden or of surviving life in a refugee camp. Her Government was currently in dialogue with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees about how to tackle the issue at a global level. Sweden also planned to share the lessons it had learned in that regard at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2016.

51. The Government had undertaken extensive efforts to educate newcomers to the country, particularly unaccompanied minors, about their rights and about Swedish laws. The issue of child marriage was addressed as part of those education efforts, which would be expanded further and would primarily target homes where unaccompanied minors were living.

52. Under the current laws, Swedish citizens who committed sexual offences abroad could be prosecuted by the Swedish judicial system in cases where the victim was a minor. Within a few months, a proposal would be submitted to extend that possibility to cases involving adult victims. Her Government was concerned about the low rate of conviction for rape in Sweden. There were many things that could be done to address the issue, one of which was to ensure that the relevant laws and the definitions contained therein were as effective as possible.

53. An inquiry into the forced evictions that had occurred was currently under way. A large-scale national survey on homelessness was being conducted, and its findings would include information on the situation of vulnerable groups with respect to homelessness. Her Government was aware of the need for more affordable housing for a number of groups and was looking at the issue from a holistic perspective. It had launched at least five key

housing initiatives, which included investment in the construction of smaller, cheaper homes.

54. The eviction of vulnerable European Union citizens was a very complex issue. The Malmö municipality had issued a very thorough report on the eviction of Roma migrants referred to earlier. In that case, the land in question was privately owned, and the owner had been trying for years to regain access to his land. The local government and NGOs had made a number of efforts to engage in dialogue with the Roma community living there. Such cases needed to be addressed on many different levels, including through bilateral cooperation between the country of origin and the country of destination as well as local efforts at the commune level.

55. Minimum wage was not a political issue in Sweden, and the German system was not one that Sweden wished to emulate, as the current framework for wage negotiations was working well. Countries that set a minimum wage often lacked an extensive welfare system like the one in Sweden, which included housing allowances and support for single parents. There had been some discussion, however, about whether the relatively high salaries paid at the entry level in Sweden made it more difficult for young people to enter the labour market.

56. Her Government was investing in subsidies that encouraged employers to hire persons with disabilities. She was convinced that, once employers did hire them, they would find that those persons were able to contribute to society just like anyone else. There was a need to overcome the stigma against them.

57. The length of time that asylum seekers spent waiting for a decision on their application for asylum had been significantly reduced in recent months. Nevertheless, there were still some 140,000 persons waiting for such decisions to be issued. Those persons had the right to attend school and Swedish language courses, and they received special allowances through the social security system. They were not, however, allowed to seek employment. Discussions were ongoing about whether that restriction could be lifted, as the Government was aware that many asylum seekers were at a loss as to how to spend their free time. Her Government's aim was to ensure that the asylum application process was a positive one for the applicants and that they gained something from the process even if they ultimately were not allowed to remain in Sweden.

58. **Mr. Nilsson** (Sweden) said that his delegation did not have the requested statistics about access to school health services for asylum seekers over 18 years of age. He did, however, have data from 2013 showing that about 59 per cent of asylum seekers aged 16 to 19 attended school.

59. **Ms. Bengtson** (Sweden) said that a report would be issued later that week detailing the findings of the inquiry that was considering whether to introduce legislative amendments that would make it possible to prosecute Swedish citizens who purchased sexual services abroad.

60. **Mr. Kedzia** (Country Rapporteur) said that the dialogue had provided an opportunity for both the State party and the Committee to enrich their understanding of the Covenant rights and their implementation. The bar had been set very high in the light of the State party's past achievements, and the Committee thus had high expectations of Sweden. The State party and the Committee seemed to share an appreciation of the valuable work of civil society organizations in promoting the Covenant rights.

61. The delegation had provided interesting comments and observations about the pressures and challenges currently facing the country. He commended the delegation for its professionalism, frankness and cooperative spirit, and he hoped that the State party's planned measures to further protect Covenant rights would come to fruition as soon as possible. He also hoped that the Committee's concluding observations would assist the

authorities and civil society in their efforts. Lastly, he echoed the delegation's call for a return to the core values of democracy and inclusion on the part of all countries.

62. **Ms. Baralt** (Sweden) said that the dialogue had provided an opportunity for Sweden to become more aware of what was happening in the field of economic, social and cultural rights and that it would work to spread that increased knowledge. NGOs were vital partners in the Government's efforts to promote and protect the Covenant rights. Her Government would do its best to fulfil the responsibility that came with playing a leading role in that regard.

63. It would also disseminate the Committee's recommendations to local governments and all relevant parties. She was pleased to be part of a Government that openly identified itself as feminist, and she wished to share some of the methods her Government applied when dealing with gender-related issues. Firstly, it was important to start with a good reality check and to thoroughly assess the situation, which required the collection of data disaggregated by gender.

64. It was equally important to ensure that women and other key vulnerable groups were represented in all discussions on issues affecting them. In addition, the necessary resources should be guaranteed, as without them it would be much more difficult to bring about change. In that connection, Sweden would soon be meeting with other members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and would share its experiences with gender budgeting.

65. Lastly, leadership was also crucial, and Sweden was lucky to have a Prime Minister who gave priority to issues relating to gender and children. Pippi Longstocking, the famous character created by Swedish children's book author Astrid Lindgren, had once said, "Someone who is very strong has to be very nice also". Her Government would do its best to be nice and to help those who could not yet fully enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 12.50 p.m.